

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission  
Turners Falls, Massachusetts  
Meeting Minutes  
November 18, 2005**

**Agenda Items:**

**1. Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the January 21, 2005 Meeting**

Vice Chair Wayne MacCallum, acting as Chair, in Mr. Ed Parker's absence, called the meeting to order at 10:12 a.m.

A number of Alternate Commissioners attended including: Mr. Rick Jacobson (CT), Mr. Scott Decker (NH), Mr. Eric Palmer (VT), and Mr. Jaime Geiger (USFWS). Both the Vermont Public Sector Commissioner and the National Marine Fisheries Commissioner were absent.

Mr. MacCallum welcomed the meetings attendees who were each called to introduce themselves.

Mr. Tom Menard made a motion to approve the Minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. Charlie Thoits seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

**2. Report of the Executive Assistant**

Ms. Janice Rowan provided the following report:

The biennial Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission Research Forum was held on February 9, 2005 at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Hadley, MA. Twelve speakers covered topics that ranged from the cryopreservation of salmon milt to the impacts of global climate change. A total of 82 participants attended the Forum.

The Commission's Congressional Liaison Committee, including Lee Perry, New Hampshire Fish and Game, Jim Carroll, Connecticut River Salmon Association and Janice Rowan, Connecticut River Coordinator, traveled to Washington, D.C. and conducted 22 meetings from March 1-3, 2005 with Congressional, House Committee on Resources, Environment and Public Works Committee, and Senate Appropriations Committee staff. Three priorities were presented: (1) a need for focused research, (2) a need to maintain program operations, and, (3) a need to maintain fishway engineering capabilities. It was clear that many of the staff recognized the value of the program despite the current fiscal situation. And while no funding was allocated in 2006, the door was opened to develop New England-wide support for the salmon through Congressman Neal and Congressman Bass, as co-chairs of the New England caucus.

The Commission Chair signed two letters on behalf of the Commission on October 24, 2005. The first was a letter of support for ongoing genetics research at the USGS Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center. The letter was sent to Mr. Ben Letcher, Center Director, and copied to Mr. Bill Palmisano. Feedback from Palmisano indicated that such letters of support "carry significant weight" during their review process. The second letter provided comments to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs on the proposed Russell Biomass Power Plant. This letter was sent to Ms. Briony Angus.

The Administrative Report, a summary of CRASC finances and correspondence, follows this report.

**Discussion:**

In response to a question from Mr. Jacobson on whether there was any result to report with respect to the letter of support for genetics research, Mr. Letcher said that the USGS genetics project at the lab would be level funded. He thanked the Commission noting that the letter of support influenced the decision.

When asked to elaborate, he said that USGS had received an add of \$850,000 starting in FY2003. The lab was allocated \$150,000 from this add in FY2003, \$100,000 in FY2004, \$50,000 in FY2005, and \$29,000 in FY2006

along with \$21,000 from another add to the lab this fiscal year. This level of funding covers the geneticist position only and this partially explains why the program's genetic assessment results are slow in coming.

Mr. Jim Carroll reported that the Congressional Liaison Committee was successful at increasing political awareness of Commission issues though it was not successful in securing an add for the Commission in FY2006. Because of this success, he thought the initiative worthwhile. He recognized Mr. Lee Perry for his efforts and thanked the Commission for the chance to participate, noting that it's fun to do.

Mr. MacCallum said that the New England State Fish and Wildlife Directors are talking about a New England approach to Atlantic salmon restoration that will potentially focus the efforts of the New England caucus and expand beyond the Commission initiative in the future.

Mr. Menard motioned to accept the report. Mr. Thoits seconded the motion and the report was accepted.

### **3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair**

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided the following report:

#### **Fish Culture Workgroup**

A total of 7.7 million salmon fry was stocked last spring into habitat in the four basin states. This is the same number as last year, but still short of our 10 million goal and the 9.6 million we stocked in 2001. Agency staff was again assisted by hundreds of volunteers.

A total of 84,000 smolts was stocked from the Pittsford National Fish Hatchery last spring into the Connecticut River mainstem and the Farmington River. Smolts were transported by several cooperators. Pittsford has 80,000 presmolts on hand for stocking in the spring. A large interagency group adipose-clipped and vaccinated the presmolts against *Vibrio* and furunculosis in October. The Pittsford presmolts continue to be in good condition. Approximately 100,000 0+ salmon are on hand for smolt production in 2007. Pittsford is incubating eggs for fry production next spring and will be receiving eggs for 2008 smolt production in January. There are apparently no current plans for closure of Pittsford.

Joe Ravita of CTDEP again developed the spawning plan and coordinated spawning activities for the program. Spawning at all facilities was again a cooperative effort of program partners. Sea-run brood stock were again treated with hormones to synchronize spawning for the egg bank for future brood stock. Mature parr were collected from the Williams River to supplement sea-run males to maximize genetic diversity and increase effective population size.

Spawning is not yet complete, but egg production was projected to be 10.6 million, which is down almost two million from last year and well short of our 15 million goal. Egg production is low due to the reduction of kelts and elimination of domestics at North Attleboro NFH, the loss of production from the closed Whittemore Salmon Station, and more barren fish than usual at White River NFH.

Incubation at White River will again require assistance from cooperators due to continued staff vacancies. Fry stocking next spring will probably be reduced from this year's level. Warren SFH (NHFG) received a surplus chiller from the Nashua National Fish Hatchery but installation proved to be more expensive than anticipated and will not be completed this season.

Domestic brood stock which is surplus to program needs was allocated to the states for use in sport fisheries outside the Connecticut River.

The Allegheny National Fish Hatchery in PA was depopulated due to the discovery of IHN. Both White River and Pittsford have been temporarily pressed into service to rear lake trout to make up for the loss of Allegheny. They will be provided extra resources to do so, and the lake trout rearing is not expected to impact Connecticut River salmon production.

Staffing and budgetary concerns continue to be a major problem at several program facilities. However, the assistant manager position at White River NFH will be advertised soon and seasonals are being hired there. The term position at Cronin NSS has been extended until April and hopefully will be converted into a permanent position. The Sunderland Office of Fisheries Assistance remains vacant as does the manager position at Pittsford. Steve Jackson left that position for a new job in North Carolina this summer. The USFWS has their budget for the current fiscal

year already and it is basically flat with continued reprogramming of maintenance funds for operations. Barring a hurricane related rescission, it appears that production will be able to be maintained at 2005 levels.

### **Genetics Workgroup**

Genetically-based brood stock management continued in cooperation with Conte Lab. Sea-runs were genetically typed and matings planned to avoid breeding closely related fish. Much of the egg production of domestic brood stock at White River NFH was genetically marked@ and the resulting fry stocked in ten Regions@ made up of one or more tributaries. Smolts and adults produced from marked fry will be able to be identified to tributary of origin (or group of tributaries) by analyzing a small tissue sample (i.e. partial fin clip). The 2005 smolt run was again sampled at Cabot and Holyoke but has not been analyzed yet. The 2004 smolt analysis has been delayed due to degradation of the DNA in samples stored according to accepted protocol. Next year's 2SW adults will be the first with Marked@ domestics contributing. CRASC sent a letter to USGS urging continued funding of the genetic work being done at Conte Lab.

The 2005 year class of future brood stock at White River NFH has been PIT tagged and sufficient tags are on hand to tag the 2006 year class. PIT tagging is essential to the continuation of genetic marking research and evaluation. Sea-run fry were stocked in the Williams River and Sawmill River watersheds for future mature parr production.

### **Fish Passage Workgroup**

#### **Holyoke**

The new lift facility at Holyoke appeared to operate well. One issue is that salmon sometimes linger in the flume for extended periods, which caused some salmon escapes and other problems. Installation of some type of night gate is being investigated to address this. The new shad trucking facility was a major improvement and will be even better with some additional mechanical and operational changes planned for the coming season.

#### **Turners Falls**

Continued evaluations of the Turners Falls fishways were done in 2005 to address ongoing problems with shad passage. Testing of an experimental mock entrance for the gatehouse fishway was again successful. Every shad that entered the Gatehouse ladder entered the mock entrance first and in most cases one to two weeks earlier. The Cabot ladder continued to have poor passage efficiency. NU is developing design plans for the new entrance after which we will need to reach an agreement on construction and a moratorium on major new changes. NU is proposing to have the new Gatehouse entrance ready for 2008 and a new lift at Cabot in 2009. We had hoped that at least the Gatehouse entrance could be accelerated but with the additional complication of NU planning to sell the project, this is probably not feasible.

#### **Westfield River**

Large numbers of smolts were trapped in the canal at DSI this spring. They were eventually flushed out, but this problem needs to be addressed. The final comments on the exemption for the Westfield Paper/Russell Paper Dam to restart were filed. Downstream passage, eel passage and bypass flows will be required. Another proposal at this site is to construct a pulpwood-burning generator which would use large quantities of river water and discharge heated water back to the river. CRASC sent in a letter of concern.

#### **Deerfield River**

The trigger number of four radio tagged salmon reached the No. 2 Dam. If at least four salmon reach the dam next year, construction of upstream salmon passage would be triggered.

#### **Ashuelot River**

Construction of a denial ladder at Fiske Mill Dam, which had been planned for this year has been delayed until next year. The Homestead Woolen Mill/West Swanzey Dam will either be removed or taken over by the town for repair. It was further damaged during flooding this fall, so hopefully this will facilitate the removal option, which is cheaper. The Lower Robertston and Ashuelot Paper dams had embankment breaches during the flooding, but likely will be repaired.

#### **Fifteen Mile Falls**

Transcanda (new owners of the former USGen projects on the Deerfield and Connecticut) retested the smolt sampler at Moore Dam this spring and transported captured smolts to below McIndoes. Smolt survival was tested at McIndoes this spring. Survival was high via all routes including turbines. We are waiting for final reports on both.

#### **Vermont Yankee**

Entergy, the owner of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Plant has applied to increase their thermal discharge limits by one degree Fahrenheit during the "summer" (May 16 to October 15). The draft permit proposes to allow the increase except for May 16 to June 15, pending further study, because of concerns about impacts on smolt migration. Entergy also announced their intention to extend the operating license of the plant.

### **Habitat and Fish Passage Projects**

A variety of fish passage and habitat improvement projects were completed in 2005 with partial or full funding from the USFWS Connecticut River Coordinator's Office. These include removal of the Pizzini Dam on the Eightmile River, culvert retrofits for fish passage in Tower Brook (MA) and Nod Brook (CT), a feasibility study of removal of the Homestead Woolen Mill Dam on the Ashuelot, retrofitting of the eel pass at DSI on the Westfield and eight eel passage projects in Connecticut. CTDEP and the US Forest Service also completed stream habitat improvement projects.

### **Fish Counting Software**

Jeff Fryer of Salmonsoft did some demonstrations of their fish counting software in the basin this summer. The software eliminates blank frames so only frames with fish in them need to be reviewed. There has been about an 80% reduction in review time compared to video at sites where it has been used. This has a lot of potential for saving time and increasing accuracy at sites that are presently monitored by video but there is considerable expense and other issues that need to be resolved. A "proof of concept" demonstration is proposed for Cabot ladder, which Alex Haro of Conte Lab would assist with, but funding is needed (approximately \$3500).

### **Salmon Studies Workgroup**

A total of 186 adult salmon returns was documented this year, up from 69 last year. This is the best run since 1998. Most of the returns (182) were from fry stocking but there were four returns from Pittsford smolts. The run was comprised of 23 grilse and 163 2SW salmon.

Twelve of the salmon captured at Holyoke were radio tagged and released as part of Transcanada's evaluation of fish passage needs on the Deerfield. Of these, seven spent time in the Green River. One entered the Manhan River. Three passed Turners Falls, Vernon and Bellows Falls and two passed Wilder. One salmon entered the White River and two ascended the Ammonoosuc River, passing the Woodsville Dam, previously thought to be impassable. Two salmon were known to have escaped capture at Holyoke and an additional untagged grilse was seen at Vernon. Two salmon were released into the upper Westfield.

Similar to the past two years, the NU/GCC smolt mark-recapture estimate at Cabot and Holyoke resulted in a high estimate but wide confidence intervals because of relatively low numbers of smolts marked and recaptured due to high flows. The index station data also showed good production in the habitat prior to migration. Index site data for fry stocking evaluation collected this summer and fall have not been completely analyzed. It appears that densities/survival of both young of the year and yearling parr are in the normal range throughout the basin.

### **Shad Studies Workgroup**

A total of 117,000 shad was counted at Holyoke, the lowest in many years. Only 1,500 shad passed Turners Falls and 167 passed Vernon. Shad passage was also very low at Rainbow (8) but increased somewhat at DSI (913 to 1,237) from last year. Blueback herring counts were very low again; only 534 passed Holyoke.

A total of 596 shad was trucked above Vernon and 721 were trucked to the Ashuelot, both up from last year but short of targets. NHFG hauled the shad to the Ashuelot using a USFWS/SOFA truck and most of the shad hauled to the Vernon pool were hauled by the Coordinator's office with additional trips by CTDEP and Conte Lab. CTDEP also hauled shad to the Farmington (84) and Eightmile (82) rivers. Despite low shad passage and limited numbers trucked, shad reproduction was documented in the Vernon pool. Shad reproduction was also documented in the Ashuelot River. No blueback herring were trucked to the Ashuelot or Westfield rivers this year.

Shad trucking was greatly facilitated by the new facility at Holyoke. Trucking had to be suspended when USFWS funds for fuel for the shad trucks ran out. It is likely that fewer trips will be possible next spring unless additional funding for fuel can be found.

### **CRASC Research Funding**

Last winter, CRASC charged the Technical Committee with seeking funding for research into the limiting factors in salmon restoration. Proposals were submitted to the USFWS Region 5 Science Support program and the CTDEP SEP program but no funding was obtained.

### **Technical Committee Chair**

Caleb Slater (MADFW) took over as chair of the Technical Committee at our last meeting.

#### **Discussion:**

Mr. Geiger suggested that it was more appropriate for the Executive Assistant Report to include information on the status of funding and program operations. He also requested that any future reports highlight the constraints of all member agencies rather than just the USFWS as seemed the case in this report. He noted that some of the States are facing similar budget/staffing concerns.

Mr. MacCallum agreed that this suggestion was reasonable. He reported that Massachusetts is fully committed to the restoration program. The State has made cuts elsewhere to be able to maintain its commitments under the Compact.

Mr. Palmer reported that Vermont is cutting back on travel, not replacing vehicles, and not filling vacancies. However, investment in the Connecticut River program has remained consistent because it is a priority.

Mr. Carroll also agreed that a complete picture is important. Last year, Congressional staff found the financial information was not easily understood. Anything that can be done to clarify this and demonstrate trends in funding would be helpful.

When asked about seasonal hires at the White River National Fish Hatchery, Mr. Archambault reported that the hatchery would be hiring help at the same level as last year and confirmed that additional help from the partners would still be needed.

Mr. Jacobson asked how long it would take for the Allegheny National Fish Hatchery to resume production of lake trout, a program currently transferred to the Pittsford and White River hatcheries. Mr. Archambault indicated that it may be a year or more depending on what is required and whether funding is available.

Mr. Menard asked questions regarding technical issues: (1) Impact of the proposed Russell Biomass Power Plant verses the old paper mill: Since the mill closed over ten years ago, the State can't say what the impact on the salmon program would have been since that was about the time the salmon program was ramped up in the Westfield River; (2) Relationships among the declining fish runs: Declines in salmon, herring and shad runs may not be directly related. Shad and herring runs seem to be off along the whole East Coast. Shad counts here this spring may be a function of the new facility and high flow conditions. The old formula for estimating the shad population in the river is based on assumptions that are dated and no longer accurate since the lift has been remodeled. As a consequence additional research is needed to identify the proportion of shad lifted at Holyoke so that a robust estimate can be made in the future. This is an important concern. In addition, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is conducting a stock status review. The Connecticut has and Massachusetts and Rhode Island are planning to close the herring fishery though this act will not identify the cause of the decline.

Mr. Geiger was encouraged by the salmon run this spring and asked why the numbers were up? Mr. McMenemy reported that smolt production from stocked fry was about the same as in past years so that variations in returns are most likely the result of outmigration or ocean conditions. The adults that originated from stocked smolts were low in number. This smolt class was the first at Pittsford once the program was reinitiated there (after the furunculosis outbreak). The presmolts spent the summer at the White River hatchery and exhibited poor fin quality upon transfer as compared to the salmon produced at Pittsford since then. Mr. Geiger indicated an interest in the fry verses smolt stocking results. He requested that the program stay the course so that the Technical Committee can assess the value of releasing one or the other life stage.

Mr. MacCallum questioned whether the goals of 10 million fry and 100,000 smolts as listed in the 1998 revision of the Strategic Plan should be modified to reflect the current production levels. He asked if

program goals were going unmet because of facility capacity limitations or labor limitations because, if it's labor, more help can be provided. Mr. Geiger pointed out that salary costs keep going up so funds available for operations are declining. He made a point of thanking the partners for all of the assistance that they have provided since the work wouldn't be getting done at all if they weren't picking up the slack in the last few years.

Mr. Geiger asked if the Connecticut River salmon were of Penobscot origin. Mr. McMenemy replied that they were along with some other sources. Published reports indicate that the two stocks share a similar genetic profile that, though somewhat divergent, it is not different enough for clear distinction.

It was agreed that the Commission would take no action with respect to urging Northeast Generation Services to accelerate plans for building a new fishway entrance mainly because their plans to sell the facility will impede such action.

With regard to the fish passage trigger at the #2 Dam on the Deerfield River, it was confirmed that passing additional salmon would not help attain the goal since passage is based on 1 in 10 salmon released at the Holyoke dam.

The Commission discussed a letter emphasizing the importance of salmon and the impact on salmon outmigration of the Entergy Nuclear Vermont Yankee plant proposal to raise thermal output. Such a letter could help raise the profile of the issue.

There was a brief discussion on fish counting software. Currently, for example, Northeast Generating Service is videotaping the run at the Cabot fish window. The tape is reviewed and the fish passage is counted after the fact. NGS picked up the responsibility in order to maintain the counts while shad passage research was conducted at the ladder when the State lacked the funds to do it. It's labor intensive. So, fish counting software could be helpful. At smaller facilities, the software is expected to reduce review time by about 80%. If this is the case, the cost savings could easily exceed the cost of the software. However, the software won't work at larger facilities nor is it likely to work during the peak of the run. As a result, a pilot study is needed because folks are skeptical about whether the software will work here. The pilot study is expected to cost about \$3500.

Mr. MacCallum suggested that, if the USFWS can provide trucks to transfer shad, then the effort should be made to solicit donations from the sporting community for the funds to pay for the gas if gas is a limiting factor.

Mr. Palmer congratulated Mr. McMenemy for an excellent job as the Technical Committee Chair. Mr. Geiger echoed these sentiments and thanked Mr. McMenemy. Mr. MacCallum charged the Executive Assistant with sending a letter of thanks to Mr. McMenemy.

Mr. Palmer then thanked Mr. Slater for taking on the new job as Chair.

Mr. Geiger motioned to accept the report. Mr. Decker seconded the motion and the report was accepted.

#### Actions

Mr. Jones moved that the Commission send a letter to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to weigh in on the importance of shad restoration, the value of data, and the interconnectivity of restoring shad to the other migratory species. Mr. Geiger seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

The Technical Committee was charged with reviewing the model for estimating the shad population and identifying what is needed to ensure robust estimates. The Commission can then decide how to address the identified needs.

Mr. MacCallum charged the alternate Commissioners with advising their Commissioners that there is an interest in compiling a fiscal table that describes the funding trends and needs for the restoration program.

#### **4. Update and Discussion on Funding and Program Operations**

These topics were addressed under the previous agenda item.

#### **5. Congressional Initiative [2005] Discussion**

In response to Mr. MacCallum's question about the current status of the Congressional Initiative, Ms. Rowan reported that the Committee did not have a current charge from the Commission and that there were currently insufficient funds in the Commission account to pay for a Commissioner's travel as has happened in the past. Noting that the Committee's actions did not result in new funding, Mr. Carroll asked, in a business context, if it should be done again.

Mr. Geiger responded affirmatively saying that the relationship building part of the process is important. Making the Commission's accomplishments and needs known is something that should happen every year.

Mr. Carroll identified two requirements of the Committee: (1) Ms. Rowan or someone in her position is required to administer the effort, and (2) the Technical Committee needs to build a list of needs and justifications by State so that the Committee can effectively engage the legislators.

Mr. MacCallum agreed saying that he endorsed the effort. He noted that the Commission was not prepared to define the extent but that Mr. Carroll, Ms. Rowan and Mr. Perry should continue the effort with the latitude required to do the job. If funding for travel is an issue, the Commission will have to address that concern – perhaps through local legislative office visits instead of a trip to Washington. He noted that the current Massachusetts administration has consolidated all legislative, budget and policy issues in the Governor's Office limiting his current engagement with the Congressional delegation as well as local legislators. He noted that budget needs have been and can continue to be identified through the International Fish and Wildlife Association.

Mr. Geiger said that the USFWS staff is planning trips to Washington so it would be helpful to have Commission recommendations in hand. He suggested that the upcoming New England State Director's meeting might be a good place for the Commissioners to talk about recommendations.

Mr. Jacobson said that Connecticut supports an annual initiative. He further highlighted what such a commitment means to CRASC noting that it would require (1) travel funds, (2) staff support, (3) agency commitment to produce the needed information, and (4) empowerment of volunteers like Mr. Carroll from the Connecticut River Salmon Association to represent the Commission.

Mr. Palmer indicated that he would be surprised if the Committee's efforts resulted in additional funding every year but he did expect that the Committee's efforts would yield long term results. As a consequence, he supports the initiative.

Mr. Menard motioned to endorse and continue the Commission's Congressional Initiative in 2006. Mr. Jacobson seconded the motion. In discussion, the motion was amended as follows: Mr. Jones motioned to endorse and continue the Commission's Congressional Initiative into the foreseeable future. Mr. Thoits seconded this amended motion. All approved.

#### **6. 2006 Meeting Dates and Other Business**

The Commission scheduled 2006 meeting dates: February 2, and November 16.

[The Technical Committee scheduled 2006 meeting dates subsequently: January 26, June 28, and November 6.]

Mr. Geiger reported that the NMFS/USFWS Biological Review Team would be providing a status review on the Penobscot River salmon for inclusion as an endangered/threatened species in late December 2005 or January 2006. There is a potential that the Penobscot River salmon will be recommended for listing. He

ensured the Commission that he would keep them informed and he encouraged them to be engaged in the process because there may be a number of direct and indirect consequences and ramifications including policy, management and scientific implications for the program. The State agencies will have the opportunity to comment once the recommendation is made.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.



**Attendance**

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Wayne MacCallum	MDFW
Jaime Geiger	USFWS
Charles Thoits III	NH Public Sector
Scott Decker	NHFG
Tom Menard	MA Public Sector
Bill Archambault	USFWS
Caleb Slater	MDFW
Bob Jones	CT Public Sector
Jim Carroll	CRSA
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Rick Jacobson	CTDEP
John Warner	USFWS
Ben Letcher	USGS